

*A particular Attention to the Instruction of the  
Young recommended, in*

A

D I S C O U R S E,

DELIVERED AT THE

GRAVEL-PIT MEETING,

I N

H A C K N E Y,

DECEMBER 4, 1791,

ON ENTERING ON THE

OFFICE OF PASTOR

TO THE

CONGREGATION OF PROTESTANT DISSENTERS,  
ASSEMBLING IN THAT PLACE.

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[BY JOSEPH PRIESTLEY, LL.D. F.R.S. &c.]

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L O N D O N:

PRINTED FOR J. JOHNSON, NO. 72, ST. PAUL'S  
CHURCH YARD.

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T H E  
P R E F A C E.

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**H**AVING recommended the separate instruction of children and young persons in the following discourse, and many of my friends having expressed their wishes, that I would give a particular account of my conduct in this respect at Birmingham, I shall take this opportunity of doing it. But I must previously observe, that I have more than once changed my methods, and may see reason to do so again. Besides, no one person's custom will exactly suit another, especially in a different situation. In all these things we must be guided by our particular dispositions, and the circumstances in which we find ourselves. What I did in the last years of my residence at Birmingham was as follows.

I distributed the younger part of the congregation into three classes; the first consisting of those who were from about five or six to ten or twelve years of age; the second, of those who were from ten or twelve to sixteen or eighteen; and the third, of those who were between that age and thirty. The first and last of these classes I instructed about nine months in the year, omitting my lectures to them when the days were the shortest, as I attended the first of them before the morning service, and the last immediately after the evening service. But the middle class, which attended between the two services, I kept up all the year round.

In the first class I taught my own *Catechism for children and young persons*, and the first part of *Watts's Historical Catechism*, as altered by myself. I also made them repeat *Watts's Hymns for Children*; and when the class consisted of too many for all of them to repeat the hymn, I selected two or three by lot to do



do it, or made them recite the separate verses by turns.

In the second class I taught the second part of *Watts's Historical Catechism*, and my own *Scripture Catechism*, the object of this class being to make the children well acquainted with the scriptures. With the same view I also taught them *scripture geography*, by means of maps, which I had drawn and engraved for that purpose. Each of the children had a copy of the map, with names upon it, but in the lecture room they pointed to the places on the map without any names.

In teaching the *Scripture Catechism*, I never confined myself to the questions printed in the book, but divided most of them into a great number, and likewise introduced many others, which, if they had carefully read the portion of scripture to which they were directed, they would readily answer. I closed this lecture either with an exercise on the map, or with requiring them to find the place in which mention was made of some

remarkable fact, or which contained some important sentence, which I recited to them, the person who first found it beginning to read. This exercise, exciting emulation, was always particularly interesting to the young persons; but I made it a rule that, when any one person had been the first to find two passages, he should not speak any more. Otherwise the exercise might have been confined to a few who were more expert than the rest. The younger part of this class I commonly exercised by naming any particular chapter or verse, and requiring them to turn to it as quickly as they could.

To this class I gave every month or six weeks a subject to write upon, such as abridgements of particular portions of scripture history, the enumeration of remarkable events in particular lives, as those of Abraham, Jacob, David, &c. in the Old Testament, and Peter, Paul, and others in the New; an account of miracles performed by particular persons, or of any particular kind,

as those of Moses, Elijah, Daniel, &c. the instances of Christ healing particular diseases, as blindness, leprosy, fever, &c. accounts of men eminently good, and of others eminently bad, &c. &c. &c. Such exercises as these it will be very easy for the teacher to point out, and diversify in a great variety of ways; but the object of all of them should be to make the pupils well acquainted with the scriptures, and especially the historical parts of them.

Lastly, at the distance of about once a month, I gave to those who composed this class particular portions of scripture, or some psalm or hymn, to get by heart, which I made them repeat by lot.

To the third class I lectured from my *Institutes of natural and revealed Religion*, and also my *History of the Corruptions of Christianity*, reading a portion of those works, and enlarging upon it extempore. At one time I read a short course of lectures on *Jewish antiquities*.



*tiquities.* In this lecture I encouraged the pupils to ask me any questions whatever; and before I entered upon any lecture, I asked many questions relating to the subject of the preceding, so as in reality to go over the same ground twice. But I never looked to any particular person for an answer, lest some might be discouraged; and if no person made any answer, I explained the same subject again myself.

To this class I gave subjects of greater difficulty to write upon, such as the marks of the wisdom of God in the creation, arguments for a future state, a summary view of the the resurrection of Jesus, and other parts of the general evidence of revealed religion, as also views of the rise and progress of the corruptions of Christianity. These exercises were not absolutely required of any person, but were given voluntarily by those of the pupils who had the greatest ability and the most leisure. If any person chose it, I undertook.



took that no person should see his exercise besides myself; but in general, those who brought exercises had the privilege of seeing those of their fellow pupils.

I hardly need to observe to my brethren in the ministry, that I had more satisfaction in attending these classes than in any other part of my ministerial duty; seeing the progress my pupils actually made in religious knowledge. Whereas the effect of preaching to a mixed audience is at best slow and uncertain; and young persons, whose minds are most susceptible of impressions of all kinds, seldom feel themselves much interested in them, and consequently give little attention to them.

That the preceding are the best methods that can be taken to promote the religious instruction of youth, I am far from asserting; but that they are capable of answering this end to a considerable degree, my own experience, of many years, sufficiently proves. If the great object, which is the instruction of youth

youth in the principles of religion, and especially to make the scriptures (which are the source of all religious knowledge) familiar to them, be kept in view, adequate methods of gaining it will not fail to suggest themselves. An upright intention, and good will to the work, from a sense of its importance, joined to the idea of its practicability, is all that is really requisite. The practice itself is easy, and success certain. If any person, through distrust of himself, have doubts with respect to the last of these classes, there cannot be any with respect to the two first, and they are of the greatest importance, as the foundation of every thing else.

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*In the Press,*

The Forgiveness of Enemies recommended,  
In a Discourse intended to be delivered on the Author's  
Return to BIRMINGHAM.

A L S O,

An Appeal to the Public on the Subject of  
the late Riots in Birmingham.

This Work will be ready for Publication about the End  
of JANUARY next.

P R E F A C E.

ADDITIONS TO THE PREFACE.

SINCE this Sermon and the Preface have been printed off, I have received a letter from one of my late congregation at Birmingham, which gives such an account of the conduct of the young persons belonging to it, as fully proves the utility of the plan of instruction I have here recommended, and verifies what I have said of them, p. iv. I have therefore been advised to subjoin an extract from that letter, and the *Resolutions* of the congregation contained in it, as an encouragement to other ministers to adopt similar plans.

Speaking of a sermon, which was preached on Sunday the 11th instant, for the support of the Sunday schools belonging to the congregation, my correspondent writes as follows:

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P R E F A C E.

“ The children made a charming appearance—there were 195 of them. All the girls, having caps and tippets, appeared as though in a uniform ; and the boys, being remarkably clean in their linen, and decent in their clothes, were in no degree a disgrace to them. Your young men have so zealously followed your advice in instructing these children, by preaching to them (if you will excuse the expression) and praying with them every Sunday afternoon, that I thought it right the congregation should testify the pleasure it gave them; and accordingly several *resolutions* have been passed this afternoon, which I will copy, as I think they will give you pleasure, and afford an incontrovertible proof, in the objects they allude to, that you have not laboured in vain, but may expect a rich harvest from the good seed you have so diligently sowed amongst us. May the blessing of God render your labours at Hackney equally successful !

Extract



P R E F A C E.

Extract from the Minutes of a Congregational Meeting of the Subscribers to the late New Meeting, held on Sunday 11th Dec. 1791.

Resolved, That it appears to this meeting, that the young persons of the congregation, who have so diligently and wisely exerted themselves in the conduct of the Sunday schools, deserve the warmest acknowledgements of the society; and that it would be proper for the congregation to express their commendation of the practice which the young men have established, of preparing and delivering an address (in turns) for the instruction of the children, and of going to prayer with them every Sunday afternoon.

That the visitors of the Sunday schools belonging to this society be desired, in the first instance, to accept the affectionate thanks of the congregation, for their truly laudable exertions in the conduct of these

P R E F A C E.

these schools, together with an assurance, that the society rejoices with them in the success of their virtuous endeavours, and would earnestly exhort them to continue their diligence in this good work.

That the young men, who have associated for the purpose of instructing and encouraging youth in the paths of religion and virtue, be assured that the congregation experiences a grateful pleasure in their exertions, and earnestly intreats them to persevere in their accustomed duties, without abating of that truly commendable zeal they have hitherto manifested.

That the committee appointed for the management of the Sunday schools, which now contain 195 children, are also entitled to, and hereby desired to accept, the thanks of the congregation for seconding the efforts of the young people, and that they be assured of the disposition of the society to afford them every necessary support." 7 DE61

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## DISCOURSE, &c.

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*This also we wish, even your perfection.*

2 COR. xiii. 9.

**B**EING honoured with a call to the office of Christian minister to this congregation, I shall take this opportunity of explaining my views with respect to the object and end of it. But, not to fatigue your attention too much, I shall omit what relates to the ordinary and well-known duties of all Christian ministers, and confine myself to some particular methods which, with your approbation, I wish to introduce, in order  
more



more effectually to gain this end. And these are not mere projects, the success of which might be doubtful; but what I have employed to the greatest advantage in former situations of some continuance.

In the last of these situations I was peculiarly happy; and while I live I shall retain the most pleasing remembrance of it. In what manner it pleased divine providence, which orders all events, to remove me from it, is not, I presume, unknown to any of you. It was the hand of violence. But whatever was the part that *man* acted in it, we should never forget that there is the hand of *God*, as well as that of man, in all events, those in which the worst of men are the agents, and in which their worst passions are employed, not excepted, and that whatever men may intend, the designs of God are always just, wise, and kind.

For whatever purpose the divine Being has been pleased to remove me from Birmingham, and to make an opening for me in this place, does not yet appear, any more than how long  
this



this new station may continue. But we must conclude that it was for *good*, and I hope, my brethren, it was for good to you, and to myself also. It will, however, be the fault of both if it be not so. Let us, then, endeavour to derive from this our new relation to each other, all the advantages that it is capable of supplying; and this will be accomplished by the faithful discharge of our respective duties.

Before I proceed to explain myself any farther, I cannot avoid adverting to another circumstance in the unsearchable ways of divine providence; and such reflections as these tend to awe and humble us, to bend our wills to that of the great Being, in whose hand our breath is, and whose are all our ways, and to prepare us for any future events which that supreme and all-comprehensive mind may have destined for us.

On my annual visit to London, prior to the last, when my most honoured friend, and your late excellent pastor, was living, and even in better health and spirits than he had enjoyed

enjoyed for some years preceding, I little imagined that at my next annual visit I should preach his funeral sermon ; and at that time I as little imagined that I should be his successor in this place. Both these events, however, with every thing else that yet lies before us, and of which we are equally and happily ignorant, were then, and at all times, known to that great Being who sees the end from the beginning, and who calls things that are not as though they were. To this will, though unknown to us, let us be ever willing to submit ; firmly believing it to be the wisest and best, and holding ourselves always ready to perform the duties of any situation in which, though ever so unexpectedly, we may be placed. For every new situation has new duties. What are mine and yours at present it is our business to attend to.

It has pleased our divine Author to make man a social being ; and he has led us by this principle to distribute and class ourselves in a great variety of ways, for civil and religious purposes. This is the origin of nations, and  
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of churches ; and the duties of the members of these societies have respect to the particular objects and uses of them.

The Author of our religion, not being ignorant of human nature, had a view to this circumstance in the constitution of his church. For as the apostle says, when he ascended up on high, and led captivity captive, he gave gifts unto men, and appointed in his church not only extraordinary officers, such as apostles and prophets, but likewise ordinary ones, as pastors and teachers, for the work of the saints, and for the edifying of the body of Christ. The few rules of discipline which he established, have respect to associated bodies of Christians. For he says, that if a brother offend, the person offended must first tell him his fault to himself alone. After this he is to take one or two with him ; but if these methods fail, he is to bring the affair before the church ; and if the person who is in fault will not hear the church, he is to be considered as a heathen or a publican ; i. e. he is to be excluded from their societies, and the advantages of them.

Wherever



Wherever the apostles preached christianity, they established churches, with regular officers, whose duty respected those churches. Wherever there was a sufficient number of converts, they made a formal appointment of elders and deacons, to attend both to the spiritual and temporal concerns of the churches; and the members of these churches had regular meetings, at least once a week, on the Lord's day, and then the elders and deacons constantly officiated. The scriptures were publicly read, prayers were made, psalms were sung, and the Lord's supper administered; and it was the business of some persons to see that these things were done *decently and in order*.

For this purpose Timothy, and no doubt other Christian ministers, were to give themselves wholly to these duties, and especially to improve themselves by the diligent study of the scriptures, so as to qualify them to instruct others. That such was the constant practice of the apostles, of all the primitive Christians, and indeed of all Christians of every age to the present time, in whatever  
else



else they might differ, is undeniable. We cannot doubt, therefore, but that Christ himself, and the apostles, as well as all Christians in every age, were fully apprized of the uses of Christian churches regularly constituted, and that the business of Christian instruction and edification could not be so well conducted without them.

But had we known nothing of the opinion or practice of our Saviour or the apostles, with respect to this subject, we must ourselves, if we had given any attention to the nature and end of Christianity, to the nature of man, and to the situation of all Christians in this state of trial, have discovered the propriety and use of Christian societies, with proper officers to preside and officiate in them: for officers are necessary in all societies.

Christianity is a system of doctrines and of duties. The doctrines, few and simple as they are, require to be taught and explained, the corruptions and abuses which have been introduced into it must be guarded against, and the

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duties of christianity must be inculcated. To do this to each individual separately, is evidently impossible ; and the instruction which suits one person may equally suit great numbers ; and therefore it is most convenient to give them to the whole society at the same time. Besides, christian duties are inculcated with much greater effect to societies than to single persons. If any impression is to be made upon the heart, and the affections ; if men are to be led to *feel*, in order to determine, and to act, the discourses will be delivered to much greater advantage to a society than to separate individuals. The teacher himself will be much more animated, and he will therefore speak to greater effect, in addressing a large audience, than in speaking to single persons ; and every individual of the audience will feel the force of the exhortation much more sensibly himself, when he perceives the effect of it upon others.

It is of great importance, therefore, that Christians should form themselves into societies, and that numbers should hear instruction  
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and exhortation at the same time. And that prayer is highly useful, and therefore proper, upon such occasions, is evident for exactly the same reason. It seems unquestionable, that if prayer, or an address to the supreme Being, be proper at all, it must be as proper for societies as for single persons; and one of the company may as well be the mouth of the rest in speaking on this occasion as on any other.

Here, however, I find a society of Christians so constituted. You, my brethren, and your fathers before you, have been used to assemble, and to assemble in this place, for the purpose of Christian instruction and Christian worship. You have appointed me to discharge the duties of your public instructor, and to address the supreme Being in your name.

I have accepted of the appointment, and by the help of God shall discharge the duties of this honourable office; and with respect to it I trust that I can adopt the language of the



apostle in my text: *This also I wish, even your perfection.*

It will be my ambition, in humble imitation of the zeal, and exemplary conduct of my predecessor, not only that you be well instructed in the doctrines of Christianity, and exhorted to the duties of it, but that you distinguish yourselves among Christian churches by your superior excellence in these respects. An emulation of this kind is far from being censurable. It is commendable in all Christian societies, in all Christian ministers, and in all Christian persons. We should *study earnestly the best gifts, and provoke unto love and to good works.* It will be my wish to have it in my power to boast of you, as I rejoice in being able to do with respect to the congregation that I served at Leeds, and still more that of Birmingham; and I think I may venture to say that there is not in this country a Christian society, consisting of persons, and especially those in younger life, better informed with respect to the principles of Christianity in all their extent, or more zealous and exemplary in the discharge of the duties of it.

Many

Many young persons of both sexes in that congregation are sufficiently qualified to instruct others, and indeed are already in the habit of doing it.

What I would principally recommend for this excellent purpose (to give such an idea of the business as a single discourse will admit) is to divide the younger part of the congregation into two or three classes, according to their age, and the degree of their knowledge, and to instruct them separately, when no other persons, strangers or parents, are present. The reason of this is pretty obvious. For no person can speak to young people as he naturally would, and as he ought to do, when others are present. This necessarily divides his attention, and leads him to speak as he would wish not those who are to be instructed, but those who are not to be instructed, to hear.

For a reason almost as obvious, I would confine this course of instruction by classes to persons under the age of thirty. When I began these lectures, which was in the place

of my first settlement as a minister, I was not aware of the importance of this rule, and invited the whole congregation to attend the lectures. But the consequence was, that the more elderly part of the congregation came in preference to the younger part, and many of these came not to learn, but to teach, or rather to cavil. I do not say, I do not believe, that there would be the same inconvenience in this place; I had nothing of this kind to apprehend at Leeds, or at Birmingham. And the leading sentiments of this congregation are too nearly the same with my own, to afford any ground for it. But still I think it best to confine these courses of instruction to the age that is naturally the most teachable, and to leave persons of riper years to acquire this kind of knowledge by books or conversation. And in general they certainly stand in less need of particular assistance.

The proper object of these lectures is to communicate, in the most familiar and effectual manner, the elements of religious knowledge, in other words, to make young persons thoroughly to understand the reasons why  
they



they are Christians, why they are protestants, and why they are protestant Dissenters. It is also to teach them what pure Christianity is, and what are the corruptions and abuses that have been introduced into it. And these important articles of instruction cannot be given in detail, so as to impress the mind properly, in miscellaneous discourses, which those from the pulpit always, and in a manner necessarily, are, but only in a regular system, in which the easiest principles are explained in the first place, and articles of greater difficulty in their proper connection afterwards.

Give me leave in this place to observe, that, in order to carry this plan of instruction into effect, and for other important purposes of a Christian society, the minister should have the aid of persons of authority and influence in the congregation, who may do many things with propriety and effect which may be very necessary to be done, but yet can least of all be expected from a person in the situation of a minister, and especially a dissenting minister. At Birmingham about twelve members were chosen annually by

ballot, as elders, to assist the ministers in superintending the affairs of the congregation. With respect to this plan of lectures, some of these persons annually took an account of all the young persons who were of a proper age to be admitted into the classes, and in return I gave to them an annual account of those who had attended; that if any admonition was proper to be given on the subject, it might be by *them*; the province of the minister being confined to the instruction of those who attended him. My advice to these elders, and to the congregation at large, was that those who were properly *children*, and of a suitable age to be admitted into the two first classes, should be obliged by the authority of their parents to attend them; but that those who were arrived to the age that was proper for the highest class, viz. from sixteen or eighteen to thirty, should be allowed to judge and act for themselves, their parents interposing their advice only.

I reserve the mention of other particulars of a general plan for the edification of Christian societies to another opportunity; contenting myself for the present with the mention

tion of only one particular more, which is that in reading the scriptures I made it a rule to myself to give an exposition of what I read; and this I have reason to think was generally considered to be the most instructive and useful part of my public services. This exposition is the more useful, as it gives the minister an opportunity of mentioning a variety of topics, and especially those of a critical and historical kind, which it is of considerable importance that Christians should be acquainted with, and yet are of such a nature, that they might never find a proper place in a sermon. Presuming that you cannot disapprove of this part of my plan, I shall the next Lord's day begin to read and expound the gospel history in the order of a harmony; and then, God willing, go through the whole of the New Testament in order; and, if it should be acceptable, I may occasionally give this exposition in the place of a sermon.

Having now mentioned what appears to me to be necessary on the present occasion, of what I had to suggest for the edification of this Christian society, I shall just speak to a few  
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objections that may be made to the introduction of them.

It may be said that the instruction of the younger part of the congregation by classes must have been found impracticable, at least in the metropolis, or it would certainly have been adopted and continued. But I cannot easily persuade myself that what has been found very practicable, and highly useful, in large country towns, should not be so in this or any other place. It is certainly as much *wanted* in or near London as in any place whatever. There young persons are most of all in the way of seduction both with respect to principles and practice; and therefore the guard against this seduction in this place ought to be peculiarly strong.

Young men in particular are much more likely to meet with unbelievers in the metropolis, than in any other part of the kingdom. They ought, therefore, to be better grounded in the evidences of Christianity; that, as the apostle says, they may always be able to *give a reason of the hope that is in them*. Here also  
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they are more likely to meet with persons of religious persuasions different from their own, and therefore they ought to be well versed in every thing relating to the theory of religion, and the history of it, or the whole compass of religious controversy, in order that to the arguments of others they may be able to oppose their own. And since you would not wish that things of this kind should be frequently brought into the pulpit (though there may be the greatest propriety in doing this occasionally) there should be some other proper opportunity of giving this kind of information.

What is the reason why so many young persons of the present age become unbelievers, or why do others of them desert the dissenting interest? It can only be because they were not at a proper age taught to understand, and to value, their principles, as Christians or Dissenters; and therefore the means that has hitherto been employed to attain this desirable end have not been sufficient. Consequently there is a call upon us to attempt something that has not yet been done.

Besides,

Besides, why should that which is actually practised in other places, great cities not excepted, be deemed impracticable here? In all churches of foreign Protestants, the separate instruction of children and young persons out of the pulpit, is considered to be as much the stated duty of the minister as any thing that he does in it. With them there is no example of any persons whatever, rich or poor, growing up to years of maturity without going through a regular course of catechising; after which they of course become communicants. This, therefore, is necessarily at a very early age, never later than about fourteen, so that the superstitious dread of this ordinance, which has taken such firm hold on the minds of Christians in this country, and especially the Dissenters, is with them effectually precluded and unknown. And it may be presumed that when a person is in the habit of frequently declaring himself a Christian, in the least equivocal manner, he will be more attentive to the principles and the duties of his profession. It was observed as an extraordinary sight in this country, that when several thousands of Hanoverian and  
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Hessian troops, who were Lutherans, were brought over hither in the last rebellion, they all, as I have been informed, received the Lord's Supper in their ranks. With us both this Christian ordinance, and the instruction of youth preparatory to it, are equally and shamefully neglected.

It will be said by some, that no proper time can be found for these exercises; that on the Lord's day the minister is too much occupied with other duty, and on the week days those who should be his pupils; so that they can never conveniently meet. But when any object is deemed of sufficient value, the means of gaining it will be found. When I was at Strasbourg, which was in the month of Sept. 1774, going out of curiosity into a large Lutheran church, at six o'clock in the morning, I found three ministers instructing three classes at that early hour, in different parts of the church, so as to be out of each other's hearing, and one of these classes consisted of grown up young women. Going thence into another of their churches, I found two of the ministers so employed. This was after I had been in  
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the habit of giving similar lectures at Leeds. There, however, as well as at Birmingham, I found, by trial, that the most convenient time for these lectures was on the Lord's day. Having undertaken the office of pastor in this congregation, I am willing to submit to any personal inconvenience rather than that which I conceive to be the most important part of the ministerial duty should not be discharged. You will please to consider my proposal, and I shall cheerfully follow your directions with respect to the mode of carrying the scheme into execution.

If you ask how it has come to pass that this duty, so important and useful as I conceive it to be, should have been so much neglected by those who are usually called *rational dissenting ministers* (for it is not wholly neglected by others) the answer is pretty obvious. Till of late years only one system, and one book of religious instruction was received among Dissenters; and this was the *Assembly's Catechism*: and those ministers who began to enquire and think for themselves beginning to dislike the principles of that

catechism, while the people remained attached to them, had no means of freeing themselves from the embarrassment of this situation, but by neglecting this part of their duty altogether. At this day ministers are happily more at liberty to chuse their own modes of instruction; and in this favourable situation I trust they will soon generally revert to the laudable customs of our ancestors at home, and that of Protestants abroad.

Some may object to these lectures, and this exposition of the scriptures, as *innovations*, what they have not been used to. But I trust I am speaking to persons who will not object to any innovation that promises to be an improvement. Besides, the things that I now recommend, and wish to introduce, are, in fact, no innovations; being only the revival of antient customs, such as I well remember to have been practised in the place which I attended while I was young; where the minister both catechised, and likewise expounded the scriptures whenever he read them. This, indeed, is the only method of making intelligent Christians, and bringing persons well acquainted



acquainted with the scriptures, which are the source of all religious knowledge.

It may be said, that the business of catechising falls within the proper department of the parent. No doubt it does, and so does the instruction of his servants, and every other moral duty whatever. But in all this he finds his account in public instruction, both with respect to himself and every branch of his family; and the business of catechising will be carried to much more advantage, when both the parent and the minister take their part in it. Besides, at this day there are but too many parents who, having been neglected with respect to this article of instruction themselves, give but little attention to it in their own families; and in this case it is certainly better that some provision be made for doing it by the minister, than that it should be neglected altogether.

So far am I from wishing to supersede the instruction of the parent by these catechetical lectures, that this additional help will be in a manner necessary, and always useful, to the  
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children, in assisting them to perform the little tasks that may be occasionally given them; and the attention to this business, on the part of the parent, or some of the elder branches of the family, will be found to be of great use to themselves, by leading them to look back to those things which they had formerly, and perhaps but imperfectly, learned. This is a very considerable advantage, which cannot fail to accrue, in an indirect manner, from the plan of instruction that I have proposed. But I cannot in this place explain the particulars.

Lastly, some that are disposed to cavil may say, I take this opportunity of communicating my own peculiar principles; and no doubt I shall do it, as far as I find my pupils capable of understanding them. Whatever I think to be true and important myself, I shall always think it my duty to impart to others. But I shall never fail to lay greater stress upon Christianity itself, in any form, than upon my own peculiar ideas concerning it; and the great duties of the Christian life, which are of infinitely more importance than any speculative

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lative opinions, are the same on all our schemes.

As an article of *theory*, I certainly lay considerable stress on certain opinions concerning God, and his moral government, concerning the person of Christ, and some particular doctrines of revelation. I consider God as one being, and one person, and Christ as a *prophet mighty in word and in deed*, or a man inspired of God, who taught the will of God, whom God raised from the dead, and who will come again to raise all the dead, and judge the world. I also believe there is no other judgment, or future state, prior to this, which is emphatically called *the great day*; and I shall take every proper opportunity of insisting upon these important doctrines. But the article with respect to which all Christians agree, and ever have agreed, is of infinitely more moment than all the rest, viz. that there is a life after this, and that in this future life all men will receive according to their character and actions here. This is the one great truth of revelation. It is what man could never have discovered by the light of  
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of nature ; and it was in order to give the highest degree of credibility to this one truth, viz. the doctrine of a resurrection from the dead, that the divine mission of Christ and of the apostles were provided. Life and immortality are brought to light by the gospel. To remind you of this greatest of all truths, and of the moral duties which a regard to this truth tends to enforce, is the great business of every Christian minister. Every thing else that he teaches, or does, is subservient to this. For this reason our great object is to inculcate that deep reverence for God, that pure benevolence to man, and that command of our private appetites and passions, which give a dignity to the human character, and constitute our only preparation for that future state, which the gospel holds out to us.

Since every person who ever called himself a Christian, holds this great article of Christian faith, I receive him as a brother, in whatever light he may consider me ; believing that if we equally cultivate the spirit, and equally attend to the duties, of christianity, our common Saviour, and that God, whose

servant our Saviour was, will regard us with equal favour.

I call myself an Unitarian, hitherto more usually called a Socinian, but I do not believe I shall have any advantage hereafter over the Arian, or the Trinitarian, who shall equally feel and act as becomes a Christian. Members of the church of England, and also of that of Rome, holding, as I do, the great doctrine abovementioned, as taught by Christ, I consider as brother Christians, though they may not acknowledge me in that light. I protest against the corruptions and abuses which I believe those churches have introduced into Christianity, and of supporting in it; conceiving that the belief, and in some degree even the moral influence, of Christianity is obstructed by that means. But if they be sincere in their belief, I have no prejudice against their persons. I am willing to believe that they honestly follow the light that God has given them, which is all I can pretend to do; and if I imagine that I *know* more than they, I certainly ought to *do* more, distinguishing myself by my zeal in the cause of  
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the gospel, in proportion as I conceive that I hold it in greater purity.

There are more particulars relating to the good estate of Christian societies, that I shall some time or other take the liberty of laying before you ; but I wish that, in the first place, you would well consider what I have recommended at present, as being of much more importance than any of the rest. All that your ministers can do is to advise. You are to judge ; and also to assist in the execution.

Let us then, my Christian brethren, while the connection that is now begun, and which, like every thing else here below, is of uncertain duration, shall continue, give mutual assistance to each other. We have, I trust, but one common object, as we have certainly but one common interest ; and we are all accountable to that great Being, who fixes the bounds of our habitation, and whose providence orders all events, for the faithful discharge of our proper duty, in every relation of life. It will be my part, having  
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given more attention to the various articles of Christian knowledge than you can have had an opportunity of doing, to impart to you whatever I deem to be useful and important. It is yours to attend, and to judge with candour, to embrace the truth whenever you perceive its evidence, and to exercise forbearance towards myself, as well as towards all other Christians, whenever you see reason to withhold your assent.

But our greatest duties relate not to speculation, but to practice. We are all to be *bearers* of the word; but the great article of all is to be *doers* of the work assigned us by God to do. When our Lord shall return, and take an account of his servants, the enquiry that he will make will not be what we thought concerning his person, or any other subject of speculation, but whether we shall have obeyed his commands, and especially whether we shall have fulfilled the great duty of Christian love, which includes that of candour, and forbearance towards our erring brethren.

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Your late excellent pastor and myself held several opinions very materially different from each other ; yet I think I may flatter myself so far as to say, that few men ever entertained a more sincere esteem for each other ; because we had alike the strongest sense of the insignificance of the greatest articles of speculation compared to the smallest articles of Christian practice. All that we, my brethren, can wish is to follow his steps, in order to have a happy meeting with him, and such as he was, hereafter ; and I have hardly an idea of a state of greater happiness for lovers of truth, and lovers of virtue, of our race, than frequent intercourse with such persons as he was, whose character I had an opportunity of enlarging upon the last time that I spake from this place. As the vicious never fail to corrupt one another by their society, so the virtuous continually improve each other ; and we must not forget that the most perfect of our race are still imperfect characters, though capable of infinite improvement ; and that the farther we are advanced towards perfection on this side the grave, the greater advantage

tage we shall set out with in that which commences beyond it.

To this great end let us, my brethren, bend all our endeavors. The whole of this life is but a temporary and probationary state, the proper business of which is our preparation for a future and permanent one; and Christian societies, with a provision for public instruction, are only one means of assisting us in this preparation, by providing that men be admonished of their duty, and taught how to derive the proper advantage from every incident in life, respecting ourselves or others. When this great end shall be accomplished; when, by this and every other proper means, we shall be *built up in the holy faith whereof we make profession*, and especially when we shall have *edified one another in love*, then will the faithful pastor, and the well-instructed and improved hearers, be prepared, to meet the great Shepherd of the whole flock, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.

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